

“We’re almost there!” I exclaimed, peering out of my airplane window. As we descended, I saw the bird’s-eye view of beaches, and the islands of Hawaii dotting the ocean. After we landed, the passengers disembarked excitedly.

The next day, we set out for a volcano tour. A tour guide greeted all the families. “Hi, I’m Mr. Peterson! Today we’re headed to Mauna Kea! Everyone ready?”

“Yes!” We cheered.

“Let’s go!”

As we walked past the beach, I was amazed by beautiful ocean waves lapping at the golden shores, palm trees swaying, and wildflowers blooming. “This is home to endangered monk seals,” Mr. Peterson explained. “There’s a seal that comes here daily at this time. Lots of fish to eat in these warm waters. Or.... just watching some touring humans!”

Everyone laughed.

“Did he already come?” I asked.

“No, not yet.” Mr. Peterson replied. “It’s unusual.” The group kept walking.

“Can I stay a little longer to see the seal?” I asked my parents.

“Just stay in sight. Don’t wander off the beach.” Mom replied.

“I hope he shows up. Catch up with us soon.” Mr. Peterson said.

I peered into the water. There were dozens of fish darting through it. I studied the water, walking along the beach.

I found a large murky spot in the water from a cloud of dislodged sand. *As if something had struggled to get away?* Then I spotted footprints. These were hiking boots, not flip-flops, right next to tire marks.

I followed the tire marks behind the boulders that led me to a parked pick-up truck. There was a huge glass tank in the back, hastily covered. I lifted the covers to see what was in the tank. *The monk seal.*

My heart started pounding when I heard men as they talked. I crawled behind the rocks out of sight.

"We don't want anybody seeing this seal; we need another sheet," one said. "That's a big seal! A lot of money!" The other said happily.

As they walked away from the truck I made up my mind. I stealthily ran to the truck and pulled off the sheet. The seal looked at me as I unfolded the back ramp. I jumped onto the truck and pushed the tank with all my might until it slid to the ground with a thud. But the seal was still stuck. The men heard the noise from the truck and turned around. I thought my plan had failed. But in a flash of inspiration, I grabbed a rock and smashed the glass.

The seal jumped out of the tank and slid across the sand into the water. It turned around to look at me one last time before it swam away so fast that it was out of sight within a few seconds.

Footsteps pounded behind me. I ran away as fast and hid behind the rocks. "Where'd that kid go?!" The two poachers were far behind.

I smiled. I had saved the seal.